

Almost 700 local long-term care staff, residents tested for COVID-19 so far

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Nearly 700 long-term care residents and staff have been tested for COVID-19 so far in the Porcupine Health Unit area, according to medical officer of health Dr. Lianne Catton.

A provincial initiative requires all long-term care staff and residents to be tested by May 15. To date, 678 people have been tested at four of the 10 long-term care homes in the region. Those tests are in addition to the 2,476 tests the health unit reported in its daily update on testing. Altogether, that means more than 3,150 COVID-19 tests have been done locally.

Through the enhanced testing a resident at the Golden Manor, a Timmins woman in her 60s, who is asymptomatic, has been identified as the 62nd confirmed COVID-19 case in the PHU area. An outbreak of the virus has been declared at the facility.

At today's daily health table for the pandemic, Catton said all the other tests at the home are negative, and they are waiting on the results of a handful of tests.

"At this point in time, we'll continue to work with the home to monitor the situation and ensure that all staff and residents are protected, as they have been doing consistently," she said.

The latest case is the first asymptomatic case in the long-term care testing surveillance, said Catton.

She explained there could be two things occurring.

"One is we know that the symptoms are exceedingly mild and we are seeing an increase in diverse and atypical symptoms and so it's always possible that there are very, very mild symptoms that didn't last very long that potentially could have heralded a COVID infection. The other is that sometimes we could be picking up a case before they are symptomatic and so it requires monitoring for a few days to see if any symptoms develop and so we will continue to do that," she said.

People are encouraged to continue following the public health measures. Those are to stay home except for essential trips, wash your hands often, and physical distancing outside the home.

"It reduces the possibility of transmission of people who are even potentially pre-symptomatic or so early in the symptomatic phase that they don't have anything really noticing as being very different or anyone who's potentially asymptomatic still and could be shedding. These are always concerns, this is a new infectious disease and things continue to change and evolve and public health continues to evolve with it," said Catton.

To meet the demand of increased testing, the health unit is increasing its internal capacity.

She said more staff are being trained to follow up on cases.

"We have always met and exceeded the provincial guidance with respect to connecting with cases and contacts of cases within 24 hours, usually within a couple of hours of being notified of a positive result," she said.

Timmins clerk Steph Palmateer also gave an update today.

To date, he said the city has received 103 COVID-19 complaints. No charges have been laid.

He also issued a reminder for Mother's Day, coming up Sunday, May 10.

"Our cemeteries will be open for visitation, but we would like to remind the public about the provincial gathering restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic; only five people being permitted to be together and while doing so they must be practicing the safe physical distancing of at least two metres or six feet. We know and understand how hard this is on families, unfortunately these are necessary

restrictions for everyone's safety, so we do ask that if you're out visiting please do adhere to the provincial requirements," he said.

With the province extending an emergency order today, CAO Dave Landers said logistics and issues of physical distancing has led to the curbside [spring clean-up being cancelled](#).

Instead, the city is opening up the Deloro Landfill for extended hours May 25 - May 30. Tipping fees will also be waived.

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